



Montgomery County

Office of Intergovernmental Relations

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SB 210

DATE: February 19, 2008

SPONSOR: The President (By Request - Administration) and Senators Astle, et al.

ASSIGNED TO: Finance

CONTACT PERSON: Susan Cottle Madden

POSITION: Support

MARYLAND VETERANS BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Montgomery County supports Senate Bill 210 to assist Maryland veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts with improved access to mental health care.

Various news reports have documented the increasing numbers of returning veterans from these conflicts who have behavioral health disorders ranging from post traumatic stress, to depression, and addiction as well as a significant increase in traumatic brain injury. If appropriate care is not provided, the veteran's ability to integrate successfully back into the family and the community is significantly impaired and can create safety, economic, physical and emotional risk for family members. Untreated behavioral health problems can often lead to endangerment of community members, and hospitalization or jail for those with the disorders. The *Washington Post* recently documented the serious rise in suicides and attempted suicides among members of the Army who have served in these conflicts.

There may be as many as 1,200 to 1,350 of such veterans and their families in Montgomery County.

Senate Bill 210 will benefit veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts by helping to improve "service coordination" between the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs, Maryland National Guard and Maryland Defense Force by providing information about available behavioral health services, screening and service delivery to this group of veterans (Behavioral health as defined by this bill includes mental health and alcohol and substance abuse services). In addition, the Advisory Board established by this bill will help the state and local health departments learn more about behavioral health services needed by veterans and gaps in these services.

Many of the returning wounded from Iraq suffering from traumatic brain injury and post traumatic stress syndrome are patients at National Naval Medical Center (NNMC) in Bethesda. As NNMC and Walter Reed begin to merge staffs, even more will be learned from each other's experiences that will help improve the lives of these veterans when they return home. Senate Bill 210 represents another important effort to improve services – and lives – so that those who gave up so much can once again become productive members of our communities.

Montgomery County urges the Committee to pass this important piece of legislation.